

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 1876

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER¹

III.

IN former articles we have come to the conclusion that the higher education of this country ought to be extended, and further, that this cannot be accomplished by an extension of the powers of the present Universities. The question remains how this can most properly be brought about? Let us, in the first place, refer to those projects that have already come before the public in a manner more or less definite. To begin with the American system. This is one of nearly absolute liberty. A number of men agree together to found an educational establishment, and they obtain, without any difficulty, by application to Government, the power of granting degrees. It can hardly, we think, be said that this system has worked so well in America as to encourage the hope that it may solve the educational difficulties of this country. As a rule American degrees are not highly thought of on this side the Atlantic, and we even question whether many of them command much respect on the other side. The cause of this failure is, we think, to be found in the motives which often induce men to combine together with the view of founding an educational institution. In some cases these are of the most praiseworthy character. The inhabitants of a large and influential district, while they, perhaps, differ from one another in their religious views, are yet convinced of the great importance of the higher education, and agree together to found an institution which is truly unsectarian, and which represents those good things upon which they are all agreed. But in other cases the motives of the promoters have reference not so much to the points on which they agree with the rest of the community as to those in which they differ from it; and in consequence, the institution founded partakes of a denominational character to a greater or less extent. In the one case the institution succeeds; the constituency is a large one; they possess sufficient means, and are enabled to command the services of the most eminent men—chosen only with reference to their acquirements. But, in the other case, the institution is a failure; the constituency being a limited body, is not possessed of sufficient means, and the field from which they must select their lecturers is limited by this as well as by religious considerations. They are, however, able to obtain a charter, but their degrees are of very little value.

It cannot be supposed that the British Government will ever consent to the introduction of such a system; this alternative may, therefore, be dismissed, as we see it has been (very summarily in a foot-note) by the promoters of the Owens College scheme.

The second proposal requires discussion because it appears to have commended itself to some of the leading statesmen of this country. It is the scheme for founding one great examining-board or degree-giving body for the entire country to which the various provincial colleges shall be affiliated. This scheme is alluded to in the following terms in the Owens College pamphlet:—

"Without dwelling on the experience of such systems

¹ Continued from p. 246.

as that till recently obtaining in France, or contrasting its results with those of systems like the German, it may be remarked that a centralisation of this description is at the present time, and must long remain, practically impossible in England, where neither are Oxford and Cambridge likely to surrender their self-government, nor public opinion to require them to do so."

It is probable that a central board of this nature while confining itself to the province of examination might yet require, unless under exceptional circumstances, the previous training implied in a college education. But even then its faults would be those of the present University of London carried out to their logical climax. At the risk of repeating ourselves we shall again state what we believe to be the faults of such an institution.

In the first place we have the paramount power—that of granting degrees possessed by a body which does not take the responsibility of itself imparting or seeing imparted by others a true education in the complete sense of that word. This education may no doubt be imparted by the various colleges, but the degree is given by a body which is virtually ignorant of the previous educational training of its candidates in a moral and social aspect.

In the next place the degree-examinations, as they are unconnected with any previous class examinations, form only a rough test of the amount of knowledge which each candidate can produce. There is absolutely no attempt to test the quality and excellence of the producing power of each candidate. In fine the moral and social training is not tested, and the intellectual training only imperfectly tested by the central board.

Thirdly, and this is a point of the utmost importance, the Calendar of the Central Board must inevitably embody only the best known and most widely diffused results of knowledge—not that which is growing and plastic, but that which has already grown and hardened into shape—the knowledge in fact of a past generation which has become sufficiently well established to be worthy of this species of canonisation. A very powerful inducement is thus offered to the professors of the various colleges to teach their pupils according to this syllabus, and a very powerful discouragement to attempt to alter it. They may be men of great originality and well qualified to extend and amend their respective spheres of knowledge, but they have no inducement to do so—their interest is to adhere to the syllabus as rigidly as a priest of the Church of Rome adheres to the syllabus of the Pope.

It is the old and time-honoured custom of killing off the righteous man of the present age in order the more effectually to garnish the sepulchres of his predecessors. Our readers are well aware that the natural philosophy course has changed its character very greatly of late years, and, that for this we are much indebted to Professors Sir W. Thomson and P. G. Tait. But could these men have done this under the system of a central board? If they had succeeded it must have been, as Galileo succeeded, against the attempt made by the ruling authorities of his day to stop his voice and strangle his originality.

The next proposal is a modification of this. It does not propose that the system of the University of London should swallow up all other systems, the impossibility of this consummation (however desirable in itself) being recognised. It rather proposes that the University of

London, being a good and desirable thing of which we cannot have enough, should split itself up into two parts—a southern and a northern one—a province of Canterbury and a province of York, and that the various provincial colleges in the north should form members of the great University representing the northern province.

Our reply to this proposal is that believing the University of London to represent an incomplete system we are unwilling to contemplate its universal extension whether this be brought about by the process of absorption or by that of fission.

It is alleged by some who favour this system of grouping colleges together into one University, that a healthy principle of competition is introduced into the teaching departments of the various colleges, and they quote in favour of their views the success of the University of Cambridge in producing eminent mathematicians by this system. We shall here confine ourselves to showing that this supposed analogy is delusive. What the various colleges do, and do extremely well, is to impart a moral and social training to their pupils; but it is well known that in Cambridge the real rivalry as regards mathematical honours is not between the various colleges, but between the various private tutors. The chances are in favour of a certain tutor turning out the next senior wrangler, and accordingly the inmates of the various colleges rush off to this tutor in the hope of gaining the great prize. What this system demonstrates is rather the necessity of a thorough system of tutors in addition to that of professors, in order to secure the high proficiency of a few in any department.

Thus by a species of exhaustion, and by discussing the various alternatives suggested, we come to see that we must look to the various individual provincial colleges to become the future Universities of our country; and the only question that remains is whether Owens College be yet ripe for the change. Let us present the claims of this College to our readers in the language of the pamphlet already alluded to:—

“It remains to inquire whether Owens College may be fairly considered equal to the assumption of such a position, and whether the present period is a suitable one in its history for the College to advance such a claim. The history of the College may in any case be said to have prepared it for a University future. Owens College was founded to provide instruction ‘in such branches of learning and science as were then and might be thereafter usually taught in the English Universities,’ and it has uniformly sought to pursue a course and maintain a character consistent with this intention on the part of its founder. The support given to it in the district has indisputably been largely given as to an institution desiring to hold an academical level. . . . As to curricula and branches of teaching, the Senate, while unwilling to enter into details, have no hesitation in asserting their opinion that Owens College may, taken as a whole, fairly challenge comparison with any academical institutions of this and with some of other countries. We have here a ready-formed and—in essentials—complete University organisation as regards the Faculties of Arts, Science, and Medicine, together with a newly-formed School of Law. . . . The Faculty of Divinity is indeed absent; but apart from the reasons which, in Owens College as well as elsewhere, have caused its absence, it may be worth observing that the conception of a University by no means involves the necessity that it should possess chairs and grant degrees in all the faculties. This posi-

tion it would be easy to prove from the history of several Universities of European fame.”

This is an era of great educational activity; attempts are being made to reform our great English institutions, and a Commission is at present engaged in discussing the future of the Scotch Universities.

We are convinced that an enlightened government will best complete its efforts in this direction by giving a University Charter to Owens College, not, however, as a last and crowning concession, but rather as the first of a series of concessions, all of which, let us hope, will, when the time is ripe for them, be frankly and graciously made. Let there be no disguising the fact that Owens College is but the eldest of a large and rapidly increasing family, others of whom may, we hope, in the course of time, make their appearance before the state. It may, however, be twenty or thirty years hence before any of the recently established institutions is sufficiently ripe to receive the crowning honour of a University Charter. At present no other college can hope to present similar claims representing something like 500 day students, 800 evening students, and a very large amount of voluntary endowment. This is in truth the work of a generation.

We do not think it probable that any opposition to this movement will arise on the part of the two great English Universities. Their office is rather to lend their distinguished graduates as teachers in these new institutions, and by dint of their own practice and their great influence to see that moral, social, and even physical training are encouraged, as well as training in its merely intellectual aspect. And while they themselves may in the future be probably induced to give a greater prominence to the professorial element than they have yet done, they may in their turn induce the other Universities to encourage the tutorial element to a greater extent. In fine, these two old Universities will, whatever happens, always retain a powerful voice in the educational councils of the nation.

Nor must it be supposed that we advocate the doing away with the University of London, for whatever be the plan adopted there will always be colleges which not having attained to the rank of Universities, must look to that institution as their degree-giving body.

But the function of such an institution is to redress a hardship in the case of pupils rather than to cause and perpetuate a hardship on the part of teachers. The University of London will be heartily welcomed as a channel for imparting a degree that could not otherwise be procured, but it ought not to be tolerated as a Procrustean bed for the education of the country. In fine, it was founded as the most available means of redressing a grievance, and for this very reason it is necessarily incomplete.

So long as we continue to progress—so long as colleges multiply and are not yet able to grant degrees,—so long must we retain an institution similar to the present University of London.

AGRICULTURAL WEATHER-WARNINGS IN FRANCE

AN important step has been taken by Le Verrier in the application of meteorology to practical matters by the inauguration of a system of weather-warnings specially designed for the benefit of agriculturists. The